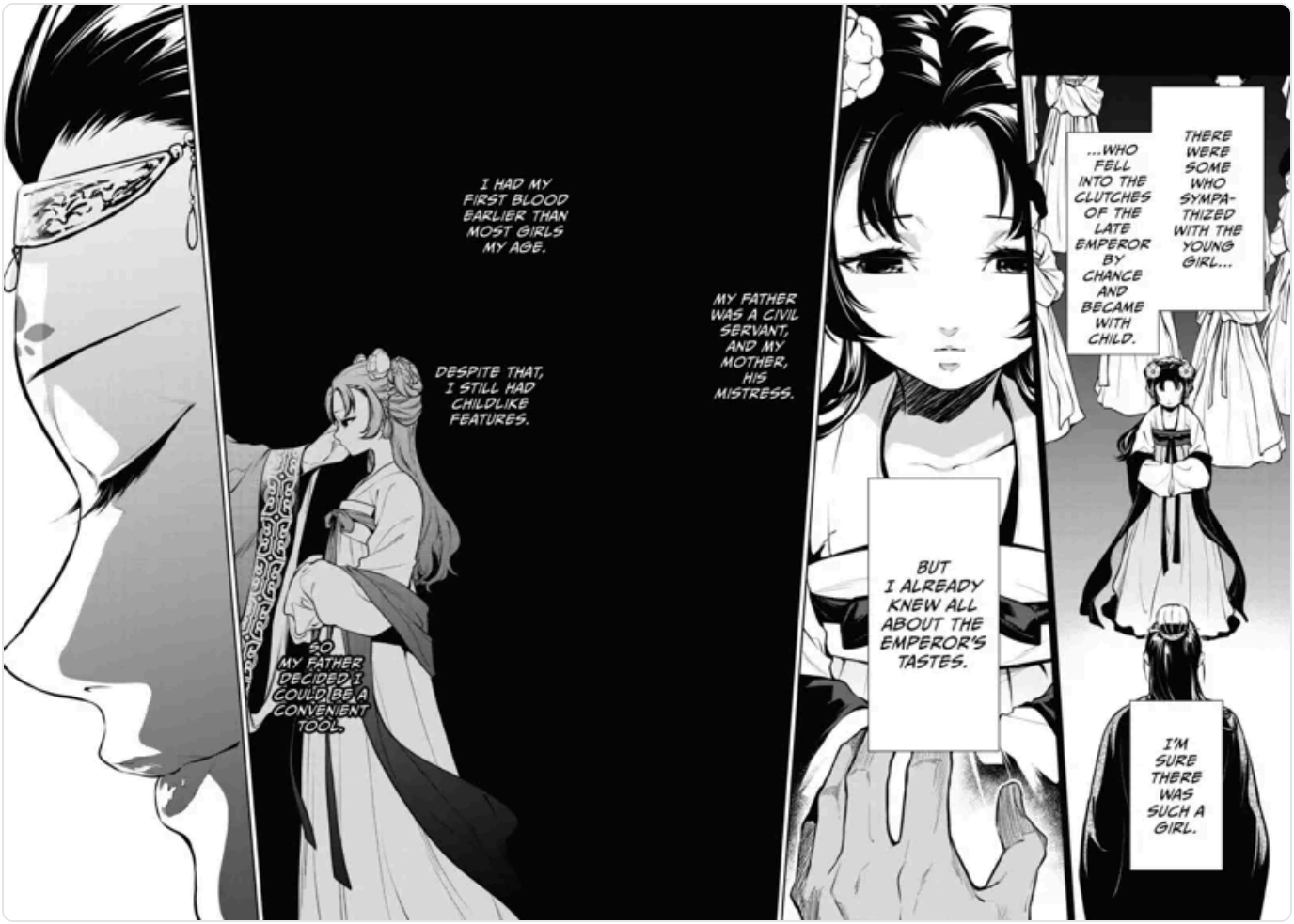
Chapter 58 The Late Emperor ③

THE PALACE GIRL NAMED MAOMAO HAS GIVEN ME THE ANSWERS I SOUGHT AND THEN SOME.
SHE MAY HAVE EVEN TOLD ME MORE THAN I STRICTLY NEEDED OR WANTED TO KNOW.
OHH ... ... HOW I SEETHE WITH RAGE RIGHT NOW.

...MAY BE ONE OF THE GIRLS IN THIS PAINTING.
OR PERHAPS I WASN'T EVEN IN-CLUDED.
...I...
THE PAINTING MAY HAVE FADED, BUT HER LARGER-THAN-LIFE PRESENCE REMAINS AS STRONG AS EVER.
IN THE END, I WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A PASSING INTEREST TO HIM.
...IS THE ONLY REASON I HAVE THIS LIFE AS THE EMPRESS DOWAGER.
THE SCAR I HAVE HERE NOW...


I HAD MY FIRST BLOOD EARLIER THAN MOST GIRLS MY AGE.
DESPITE THAT, I STILL HAD CHILDLIKE FEATURES.
SO MY FATHER DECIDED I COULD BE A CONVENIENT TOOL.
MY FATHER WAS A CIVIL SERVANT, AND MY MOTHER, HIS MISTRESS.
BUT I ALREADY KNEW ALL ABOUT THE EMPEROR'S TASTES.
THERE WERE SOME WHO SYMPA-THIZED WITH THE YOUNG GIRL...
...WHO FELL INTO THE CLUTCHES OF THE LATE EMPEROR BY CHANCE AND BECAME WITH CHILD.
I'M SURE THERE WAS SUCH A GIRL.

SHE WAS UNAWARE OF OUR FATHER'S INTENTIONS AND SIMPLY AWAITED WITH GREAT EAGERNESS THE VISIT OF THE EMPEROR SHE SO ADMIRED.
MY OLDER HALF-SISTER WAS INSTALLED AS A MID-RANKING CONSORT, AND I WAS SENT TO THE INNER COURT AS HER LADY-IN-WAITING.
BUT THE HANDSOME EMPEROR WAS CLEARLY UNINTERESTED IN THIS MEETING...
OUR MOMENT CAME SOONER THAN EXPECTED.
...AND HAD THE AIR OF A MAN WHO HAD BEEN COERCED INTO THE VISIT BY HIS EUNUCHS.
WHEN SHE MOVED TO TOUCH HIM...
BUT MY HALF-SISTER WAS BROUGHT UP LIKE A PRINCESS...
...SO SHE DIDN'T PICK UP ON IT.

...THE NEXT THING I KNEW, SHE WAS ON THE FLOOR.

IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THIS FEEBLE MAN WHO TREMBLED IN FEAR BEFORE A DAZED CONSORT OF MIDDLING RANK ON THE GROUND...
...WAS THE MOST POWERFUL PERSON IN ALL THE LAND.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
...OR APOLOGIZED TO HIS MAJESTY FOR HER DISCOURTESY.
AS A LADY-IN-WAITING, I SHOULD HAVE GONE TO MY MISTRESS'S SIDE TO COMFORT HER...

BUT IN THAT MOMENT, I CAUGHT HIS MAJESTY'S EYE JUST AS SURELY AS HE CAUGHT MINE...
I, AN OVERLY AMBITIOUS GIRL OF TEN...

...THREE NEW AREAS WERE BUILT TO HOUSE THEM.
AS THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS GREW AND GREW...
THEREAFTER, SEVERAL YOUNG GIRLS ENTRUSTED WITH A SIMILAR MISSION CAME TO THE INNER COURT.
...AND FOR THE EMPRESS TO ACCEPT HIM AS HER GRAND-SON.
I WAS LUCKY TO GIVE BIRTH TO A BOY...
DURING THIS PERIOD, I REGULARLY FOUND MYSELF IN MORTAL DANGER.
THESE WERE CONSTRUCTED AROUND THE SAME TIME THE LATE EMPEROR ASCENDED THE THRONE. THEY ARE NOW PART OF WHAT WE CALL THE SOUTHERN GROUNDS.
...AND BANISHED THE COURT PHYSICIAN WHO WAS THOUGHT TO BE THE CHILD'S FATHER.
...BUT THE LATE EMPEROR WOULDN'T ACKNOWL-EDGE THE CHILD...
THERE ONCE WAS A CONSORT WHO BORE A GIRL...

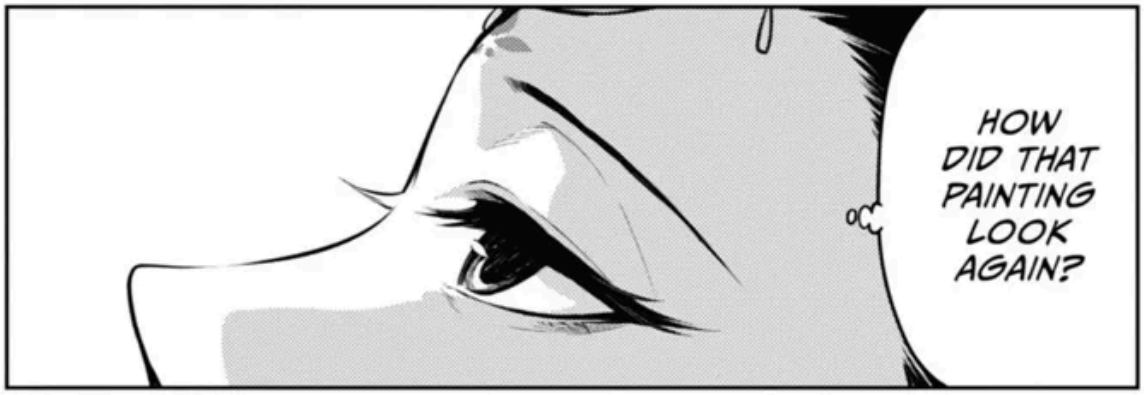
PHYSICIANS AT THE INNER COURT WERE THE ONLY MEN EXEMPT FROM BEING CASTRATED AT THE TIME.
BUT THE INCIDENT WITH THE BANISHED PHYSICIAN CHANGED THAT.
THE MAN WHO UNDER-TOOK THE PROCE-DURE ON MY BELLY...
...WAS CASTRATED FOR THAT SOLE PURPOSE, AND THE THOUGHT OF THAT PAINS ME GREATLY.
TIME PASSED, AND NO LONGER DID I LOOK LIKE A YOUNG GIRL.
THE LATE EMPEROR STOPPED COMING TO VISIT ME.
HE EXISTED TO BE THE PUPPET OF THE EMPRESS, NOTHING MORE...
...THAT PATHETIC EXCUSE OF A MAN WHO COULD ONLY HOLD A CON-VERSATION WITH LITTLE GIRLS.

I COULD NOT LET SUCH A WRETCH FORGET ME.

THERE ARE SOME WHO SUSPECT THAT MY SECOND CHILD HAS A DIFFERENT FATHER...
...BUT THAT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE.
IN MY BED...
...I SHOWED HIM THE GREAT SCAR ON MY BELLY...
ALL THOSE GIRLS HE'D LAID HIS HANDS ON...
...AND SPAT POISONOUS CURSES INTO HIS EAR OVER AND OVER, WHILE HE COWERED AND BEGGED FOR FORGIVENESS.
NO AMOUNT OF TORMENT COULD EVER COMPARE TO THE NUMBER OF SCARS HE'D LEFT ON THEM, BUT OH, HOW I MEANT TO TRY.

I WANTED TO LEAVE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON HIM, MORE PROFOUND THAN EVEN HIS MOTHER, THE GREAT EMPRESS.
SOON AFTER, THE LATE EMPEROR BROKE DOWN AND RETREATED INTO THIS CHAMBER.
I HAVE NO WISH TO PURSUE THE QUESTION OF WHO WAS TO BLAME.

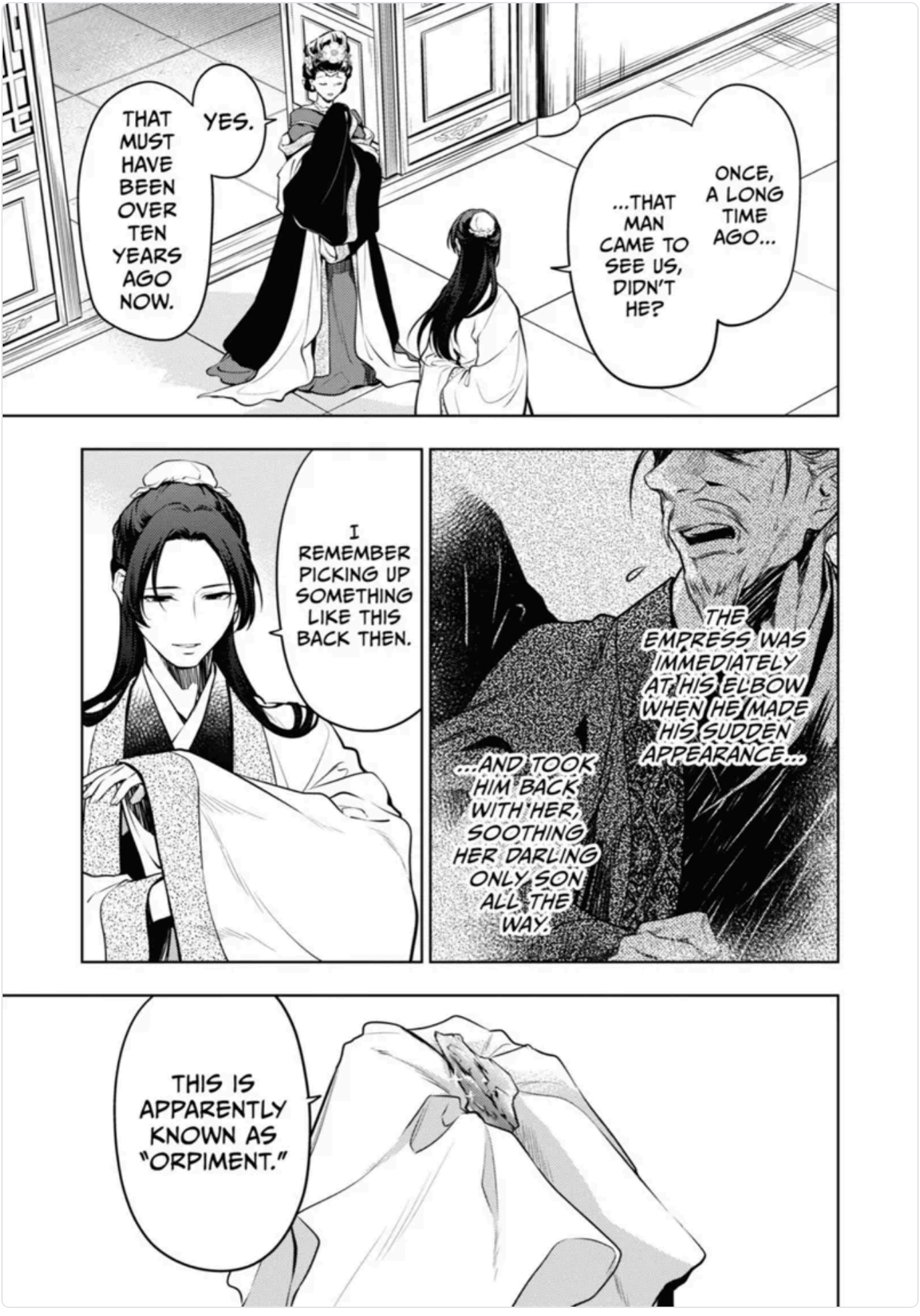
...BUT HIS MOTHER THE EMPRESS AND GUILELESS LITTLE GIRLS.
...HAD EYES FOR ANY-THING...
BUT ULTIMATELY, WHILE SHUT UP IN THIS ROOM, I DOUBT THAT MAN...


HOW DID THAT PAINTING LOOK AGAIN?

HE SAID IT WAS OUR SECRET AS HE CARESSED THE PAPER WITH HIS BRUSH...
...HIS DEMEANOR CALM AND PEACEFUL.

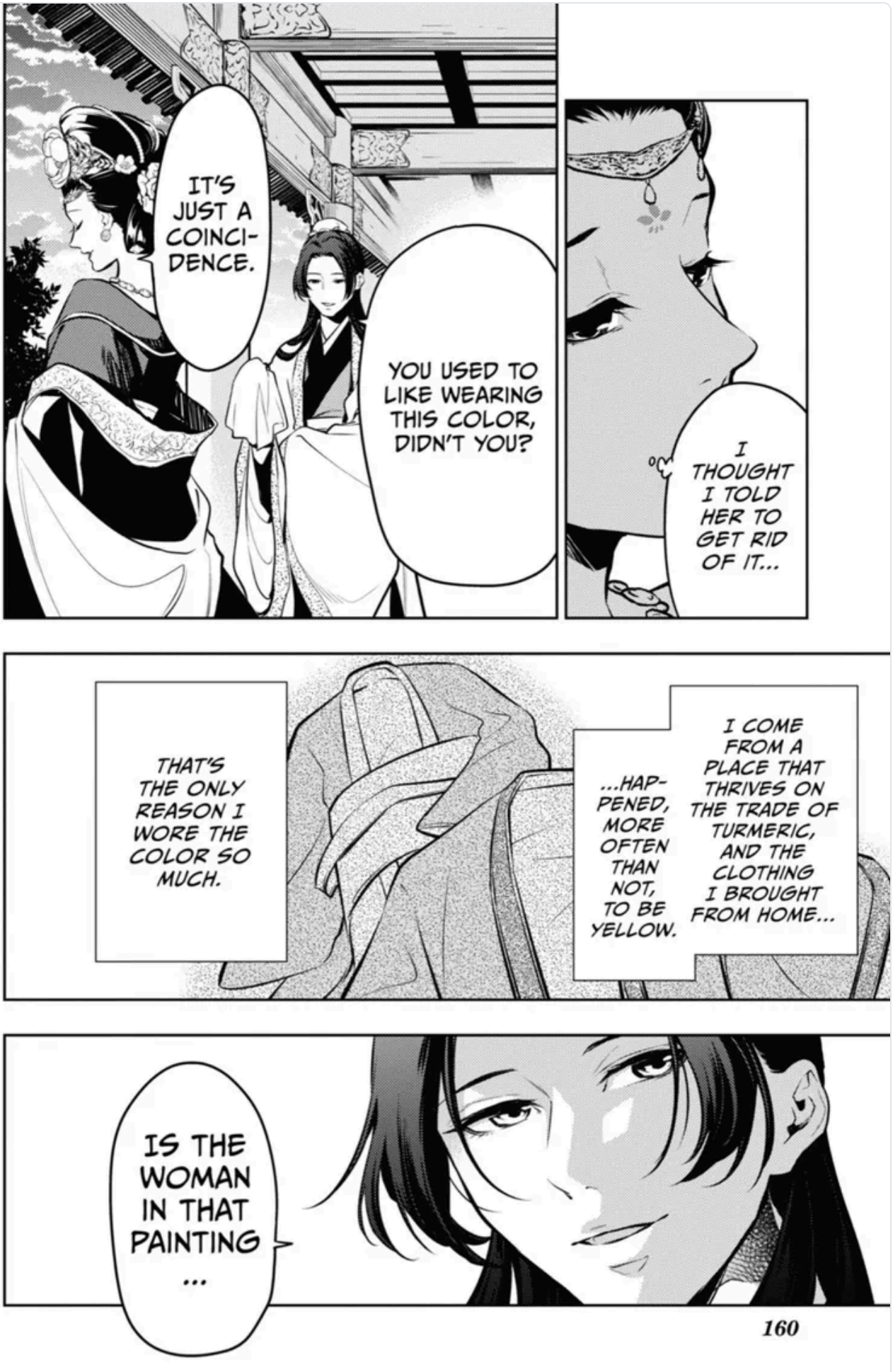
HE PAINTED ME JUST THE ONCE.

I DIDN'T NEED THE LATE EMPEROR ANYMORE...
I TREASURED THAT PAINTING AT FIRST...
...BUT I EVENTUALLY TOLD MY LADY-IN-WAITING TO THROW IT AWAY.
...JUST AS HE DIDN'T NEED ME.
EVEN IF HE'S THOUGHT TO BE THE PRODUCT OF ADULTERY...
...OR TAKEN FOR ANOTHER WOMAN'S BABE...
I WAS QUICK TO DECIDE...
...WHEN I BELIEVED MY CHILD MIGHT BE IN DANGER.
...HE'LL ALWAYS BE DEAR TO ME.


ONCE, A LONG TIME AGO...
...THAT MAN CAME TO SEE US, DIDN'T HE?
YES.
THAT MUST HAVE BEEN OVER TEN YEARS AGO NOW.
I REMEMBER PICKING UP SOMETHING LIKE THIS BACK THEN.
THE EMPRESS WAS IMMEDIATELY AT HIS ELBOW WHEN HE MADE HIS SUDDEN APPEARANCE...
...AND TOOK HIM BACK WITH HER, SOOTHING HER DARLING ONLY SON ALL THE WAY.
THIS IS APPARENTLY KNOWN AS "ORPIMENT."

SUIREN FINALLY GAVE IT BACK TO ME THIS MORNING.
...TO TAKE AWAY ANYTHING ...
...THAT HE SEEMED TO FIXATE ON PLAYING WITH.
A VERY LONG TIME AGO, I INSTRUCTED SUIREN...
...I AVOIDED MEETING HIS SEARCHING GAZES THAT SEEMED TO BE TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF MY MOOD.
NOT REALIZING HOW CRUEL IT WAS...

I THINK I'VE SEEN HIS WORK ONCE BEFORE.
BECAUSE OF THAT, HE MANAGED TO MATURE FASTER THAN MOST...
...WHILE REMAINING A CHILD AT HEART.
I'M SURE I PICKED UP THAT STONE...
...BECAUSE IT REMINDED ME OF THAT PAINTING.
THE PICTURE WAS OF A YOUNG GIRL...
...DONE IN SOFT COLORS.

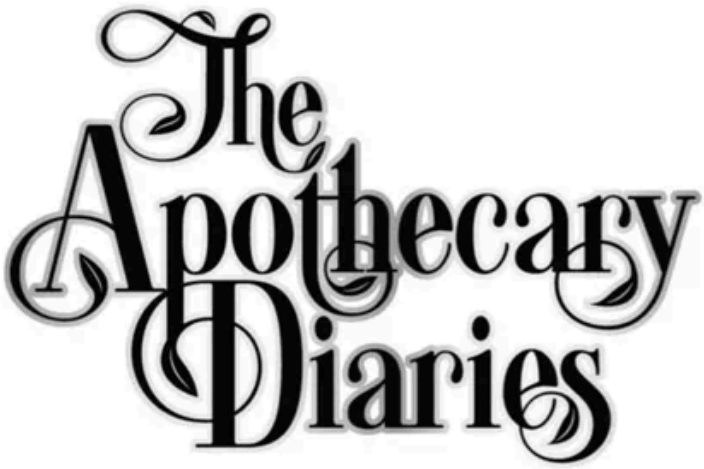

IT'S JUST A COINCI-DENCE.
YOU USED TO LIKE WEARING THIS COLOR, DIDN'T YOU?
I THOUGHT I TOLD HER TO GET RID OF IT...
THAT'S THE ONLY REASON I WORE THE COLOR SO MUCH.
...HAP-PENED, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, TO BE YELLOW.
I COME FROM A PLACE THAT THRIVES ON THE TRADE OF TURMERIC, AND THE CLOTHING I BROUGHT FROM HOME...
IS THE WOMAN IN THAT PAINTING ...
160

...TRULY THE LATE EMPRESS DOWAGER?
WHAT WAS HE TRYING TO TELL ME BACK THEN? I WONDER...

HMM.
WHO CAN SAY?
AND NOW WE'LL NEVER KNOW.
I HAVE NO IDEA.

I CHOSE NOT TO.
!!
YOU SEEM TO HAVE YOUR EYE ON A MOST INTERESTING YOUNG LADY.
ANYHOW, NEVER MIND THAT.
...HAPPENS TO BE VERY USEFUL.
...SHE JUST...

THAT SHE IS. HOW-EVER...
BUT THAT'S NOT ALL THERE IS TO IT. THAT MUCH I KNOW...
...YOU'D BE WISE TO HIDE AWAY YOUR FAVORITE...
...BECAUSE I'VE WATCHED YOU GROW UP OVER THE YEARS.
...BEFORE SOMEONE HIDES HER FROM YOU.
THE APOTHECARY DIARIES 11 • End


The Apothecary Diaries

CONGRATS!
WE'RE GETTING AN ANIME!
Thanks for reading
The Apothecary Diaries, Volume 11!
When drawing the manga, I always try to imagine how the characters would move if they were animated. I wonder how it'll look when they're moving in an actual anime! I wonder if Nanao's composition and my drawings will be used? ✧₊
I'm really looking forward to seeing it! Everyone get hyped!!
From the artist,
Nekokurage

The Apothecary Diaries...
...is getting an ANIME!
SUPER...
PUPEKI!
...looking forward to it!

Author: Natsu Hyuuga
Light novel illustrator: Touco Shino
Manga Artist: Nekokurage
The editor
You, the readers

Thank you always!

Itsuki Nanao,
the compiler

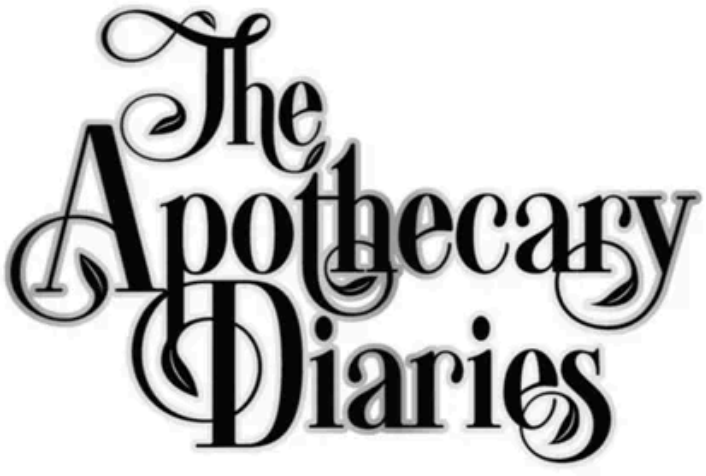
INNER COURT ETIQUETTE

Story by Itsuki Nanao Art by Nekokurage

?!
SHP
IT IS AN HONOR TO SEE YOU THIS DAY, SIR JINSHI.
FLAW-LESS.
GRRR...
WHY DID HE STOP WALKING?
HE CAN'T POSSIBLY EXPECT ME TO DO MORE THAN THIS.
STAAARE...
WHY IS SHE SUDDENLY GROVELING ON THE GROUND?
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
INCH
...I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO HERE.
SCOOT
INCH
SCOOT

THIS EVE, WE SHALL BE TELLING 13 STORIES THAT WILL CHILL YOU TO THE BONE.
YOU'LL BE COMING WITH ME TONIGHT.
SUMMER GHOST STORIES...
...AND LATER...
Next Volume Preview

I WAS INVITED TO GO HUNTING ...
DEAR ME!
WHOEVER MIGHT YOU WISH TO "TAKE BACK"?
...SO I'LL BE "TAKING HER BACK" FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS.
...MAOMAO AND COMPANY HEAD NORTH ON A HUNTING TRIP...
Continue reading for a sneak peek at Volume 12 of The Apothecary Diaries, coming soon!
The Apothecary Diaries


The
Apothecary
Diaries

THIS MUST BE THE SOURCE OF THE RUSHING WATER I HEARD BEFORE.
RUSSSH
WHAT A BREATH-TAKING SIGHT TO BEHOLD.
I'VE BROUGHT WATER FROM THE KITCHENS...
...SO YOU CAN DRINK THAT AFTER.
LET'S GET YOU COOLED OFF.

?!
YO
THWAK
WHAT WAS THAT?
YANK

THWAK
THIS SEEMS TO BE A WHOLLY UNFORESEEN SITUATION, BUT HE'S KEEPING A COOL HEAD, TO MY SURPRISE.
A FIRE LANCE ...?
GRAB
SORRY IF THIS GIVES YOU A START!

LEAP
HUH
??
THWAK